TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

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By Christopher Morley

CHIMNEYSMOKE
TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE
HIDE AND SEEK
THE ROCKING HORSE
SONGS FOR A LITTLE HOUSE
MINCE PIE

New York: George H. Doran Company

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

BY

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

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DEDICATED TO

AN ANGLO-AMERICAN MANDARIN

IN WHOSE HEART ARE MANY
CELESTIAL INSCRIPTIONS

LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

A Letter of Ballast

Dear Pearsall Smith:

All things, however minute, have their origin; and these fragments, now dedicated to you without your knowledge or permission, were in genesis both hazardous and humble. They were born in a rolltop desk. In 1918, as you know, I was working on the Philadelphia *Evening Ledger*—where I had charge of a column whose most genuine source of pride was that it first gave printers' ink to some of your prose butterflies now framed and mounted as *More Trivia.* At that time I used to write what I called *Synthetic Poems*, which began as a mild burlesque of the vers libre epidemic. But I also had a feeling that free verse, then mainly employed as the vehicle of a rather gaudy impressionism or of mere eccentricity, might prove a viable medium for humorous, ironic and satiric brevities. I experimented by including a few of the *Synthetic Poems* in a book which was in general of quite a different kind. (To gratify the publisher I will mention its title, *The Rocking Horse.*) I must admit that no one noticed them.

About the same time there arose an access of interest in Oriental poem-forms. You yourself sent me from London a volume of Arthur Waley's delightful Chinese translations. Miss

Amy Lowell and others were busy with Japanese echoes. To paraphrase the old English song, it was "Loud sing Hokku" all across the map. So instead of *Synthetic Poems* I began to call my broodings *Translations from the Chinese;* and, for some unknown reason, printed them over the bogus signature of "John Cavendish." To my surprise, and even to my embarrassment, letters soon arrived from earnest literates. Who was John Cavendish? they asked. What about these translations? they exclaimed. Where can one learn more about Chinese poetry? And they enclosed stamped addressed envelopes. Once more was testified the beautiful human faculty for taking seriously whatever appears in print. I went ahead, conscientiously, to satisfy the demand. In a little book (again I catch the publisher's eye) called *Hide and Seek* I included a large section of Chinese translations, with biographical notes upon the Oriental authors—done in such a vein that not even the gravest follower of the spurious Cavendish could mistake the intention.

But here is the gist of this unimportant matter. Little by little my Chinese sages began to coalesce and assume a voice of their own. I became not their creator but their stenographer. I began to feel a certain respect and affection for the "Old Mandarin" who was dimly emerging as their Oriental spokesman. I began to realize that the mind speaks many languages, and some of its sudden intuitions and exclamations are truly as enigmatic to us as Chinese writing. We all like to imagine that some-

where, in some far-away Orient of our spirit, there is a philosophy and a Way (as Lao-Tse would say) that views with smiling bland composure the sad antics of men under the pressure of conflicting desires. In all hearts there is this lurking minified Mandarin whose mockery is more potent because it is serene and hopeless. My own particular Mandarin was born, as I say, in a rolltop desk; by which I mean in a newspaper office. It is a favorable place for such cheerfully wistful wraiths to arise, for nowhere so instantly as in a newspaper office does one necessarily scrutinize the gallant frenzy of the race.

So my Mandarin gradually became a very real Familiar, and sometimes I see him peering out of a pigeon-hole, mocking me in his suave fashion. The odd thing is that his scoffing frequently changes into moods of pity or ecstasy that are even more disconcerting. In spite of his great age and his disillusion, he has moments that are truly boyish. We all like to say, of a man we admire greatly, that he "has the heart of a child." Certainly there is a naif appealing youthfulness in some of my Mandarin's simplicities. Occasionally, late in a winter afternoon, when I have been (after a whole day of random interruptions) trying to get a few hurried paragraphs written for the newspaper, I have quietly become aware of him standing by the window at my elbow. He looks out at that astounding vista of great buildings, terraced in golden tiers, one above another into the transparent dusk. "Why don't you get some of *that* into your writing?"

he says to me, waving his hand toward the view. But I don't have leisure to answer him, for that is the time when I am hurrying to catch the 5:27 train.

Of course he can be very annoying. It is maddening to hear him contradict and ridicule the compromises and precious makeshifts which we build for self-respect. I tell him that he is an irresponsible doctrinaire: he has never had to earn a living, to carry on a daily job, or concern himself with anything but pure rationalism. Also, he has the foreigner's awkward way of taking our idiom literally. I said to him once, trying to explain a dilemma in which I found myself, "I am between the Devil and the Deep Sea." He smiled that provoking, sallow, tilt-eyed smile of his. "Surely your choice is easy," he said, "for you pretend to be fond of the Sea." I have tried, in this small book, to translate more or less accurately some of his disturbing comments; but there are many more that I have not been able to render intelligible. His dialect is often of a sort not found in the glossaries within my reach; and his principles of judgment are so opposite to those on which most of us establish our daily conduct that, as I have told him, I should need a contradictionary to interpret him properly.

So I may, here and there, have made him responsible for sentiments and implications that are my own rather than his. I wish I could tell you how strangely wise and happy he seems, in those rare moments when I am able to give ear to him. In spite of his skepticisms, he apparently sees so much more meaning in

the human panorama than most of us do. And he has the queerest illusions. I have seen him throw down a newspaper in distress because, as he said, he found no word of Beauty in it. And when I explained to him, patiently, that that particular newspaper was not published with any such intention, he said "Then why publish it at all?"

Some of my friends, to whom I have talked about this unsettling phantom, have complained that he is too elderly to be a really helpful companion; that his politics were formed under a Bad Old Dynasty; that he is too flippant and volatile to be congenial to Young Intellectuals in whom unorthodoxy has become severe, surly, and compulsory. But I am not one of those who believe that because a man is elderly he is necessarily shallow. Everyone doubtless considers himself to be wiser, riper, more tolerant, now, than he was one year, five years, ten years ago. And if we think that to be so of ourselves, why may we not credit it as a fact in others? When I meet and talk with some of the youngest and most scathing of the rising Intellectuals, I amuse myself by imagining them as they will be, say thirty years hence. As I listen politely, I can see their faces change and wither. Those candid young foreheads a little corrugated; those jovial thunderbolts of opinion a little less detonative in effect; those busy superlatives grown a trifle grizzled with service. No—I have known so many older heads who really *are* wiser and wittier than ourselves that I cannot help concluding Time may be a tonic

rather than a sedative. And so I sincerely elect to Stand Up for the Senior Generation. (And then also, when I myself am a Senior, perhaps the Grandchildren will Stand Up for me.)

I don't know just why I should be saying all this to you, dear Pearsall Smith—except that you seem to have been singularly skilful in carrying on into what one may without offence call Maturity the very spirit and virtue of Youth. I take it that you were perhaps a little elderly in your twenties, which makes you adorably sprightly in your fifties; so much so that you have served in many ways as the Perfect Ambassador from the Men of the Nineties to the men of the Teens. In you we see how the irreverent humor and hilarious gusto we associate with youth may not merely perdure unabated into the rich urbanity of Middle Age: nay, that they are increased and quickened. Uncanonical as it may seem, Youth is the time to be docile and acceptive; not until the Fifth Decade has the mind any real right to begin laughing. Skepticism is meaningless until it emerges from a complete and experienced knowledge of all possible beliefs. Longfellow (I can hear some of my contemporaries titter)—Longfellow wrote an admirable potent little satire in his rhymed description of "What the Heart of the Young Man Said to the Psalmist." For that is exactly what the hearts of healthy-minded young men do say, and should say. It is a delicious picture of that heavenly earnestness of adolescence. The skepticism of sophomores is only an extroverted form of the same too easy credulity. No

Young Revolutionist is dangerous: it is the Elderly Revolutionist who really makes things revolve. In the young, skepticism is mere biology and demiurge: in the mature it is intellectual. And as for matters of theology (in which you have betrayed much acute interest), the study of divinity is usually placed at the wrong end of life. Surely no man should be allowed unanswerably to pulpiteer the Future Life until he is himself near enough to it to make it a reality to his spirit. But if parsons must be ordained in youth, then they should begin as Bishops, and work downward to the really vital office of curate. For the Bishop is respectfully hearkened to for his dignity and his scarlet hood; but the curate is listened to (if at all) only for what he says.

It seems too bad, I suddenly realize, to make you the victim of this grotesquely irrelevant pronouncement. But it must stand as your misfortune, since you who write so exquisitely and think with such delicate humorous honesty have shown yourself unwittingly as the ideal liaison officer between the generations. Those who would try absurdly to persuade us that there is some deep-seated and inevitable hostility between the Young Men and their Elders can never stir up more than a sham battle while we see you pacing pensively between the opposing trenches. After all, the one paramount virtue, not peculiar to any age, is sincerity.

Which of course suggests the delicious problem as to how far a man may be insincere quite innocently and unconsciously. That indeed is too perilous to discuss. But truly I sometimes

wonder if some of the embattled youths of the Younger Set, who so fiercely defy and reject the wiles of the Foundering Fathers, have ever really seen or known an Older Man? Moreover one is tempted to think that those who are so certain that Intellect and everything really interesting began about the year 1919 are insecurely rooted in the great soil of life itself. Considering that every essential joy and agony of the human spirit was already Old Stuff when Lucretius wrote, that view seems to show a disrespect to Life itself—a serious disability in any artist.

Alas, I have now far overshot my mark, and after these heroics I fear my darling Old Mandarin will seem rather tame. You yourself, dear Pearsall Smith, with your keen excisive sense, could have intimated all this in one glittering page.

Yours indeed,

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

New York,
March, 1922.

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TRANSLATIONS
FROM THE CHINESE

THE PALIMPSEST

There is, in each man's heart,
Chinese writing—
A secret script, a cryptic language:
The strange ideographs of the spirit,
Scribbled over or half erased
By the swift stenography of daily life.

No man can easily decipher this cordi-
script,
This blurred text corrupted by fears
and follies;
But now and then,
Reading his own heart
(So little studied, such fine reading
matter!)
He sees fragments of rubric shine
through—
Old words of truth and trouble
Illuminated, red and gold.
The study of this hidden language
Is what I call
Translating from the Chinese.

A TIME OF CRISIS

ON a thin blue morning
Of the Month of Officials
Came Noh Kale, the income tax
collector.
I laid down my roll of Confucius
And said, "Friend,
My treasure is at your disposal;
Let us audit it together—
Thirteen unfinished poems,
A letter from an editor
Saying that a check will be here shortly;
My ivory chopsticks,
And this view, from my tea house,
Of the girls bathing on the other side of
the river."
But still the obstinate agent
Persisted peevishly
And with the reiteration of a primitive
mind cried loudly:
"Quarterly instalment still due,
1700 taels."

INSCRIPTION FOR A BUTTERFLY'S WING

THERE are two Languages:
One is of Great Mandarins and
Important Affairs,
It is civil, precise, and meaningless.
The other,
The Speech of the Spirit,
So rarely spoken, so dimly understood,
Is haltingly whispered
By lonely men.
In the first I am glib,
In the latter I stammer;
But I know which will serve me
In the Foreign Land.

ADVICE TO THOSE HIRING YOUNG MANDARINS

WHEN I was private adviser
To Her Celestial Serenity The
Empress
It was my duty
To interview young mandarins
Applying for important positions.
I always chose those who were shy,
For shyness in a youth
Is commendable.
It is a sign that he is aware
This is a perplexing world
And it is not well to uncover
His golden soul
To those who would not understand it.

INSCRIPTION FOR A MAN-HOLE IN BROOKLYN

SOMETIMES,
In spinning over the leaves of a book,
The eye catches a glamourous phrase
That a methodical search through the volume
Fails to rediscover.
Even so, every day,
There are moments of shining astonishment
That my sober retrospection
Can never define.

INSCRIPTION FOR A DOOR-KNOCKER ON TENTH STREET

THERE are some critics
(Said the Old Mandarin, sipping a *petit verre*)
Who remind me of a gong at a grade crossing
Clanging loudly and vainly
As the train roars by.

"THE SUN'S OVER THE FOREYARD"

WHEN I was a passenger in the barque *Windrush*
I became aware of a pleasant sea custom.
Along toward noon
The captain's boy used to come politely to me
And whisper
"The captain's compliments, and the sun's over the foreyard."
And presently I learned that this meant
Come aft to the poop
And have a drink.
For mariners, men of sound self-control,
Never touch the bottle
Until the sun reaches the yards.

Now that I myself am a seaman
I always ship in square sail,
Never in steam.
In a steamer
The yards are so much higher.

THE OLD MANDARIN ON HIS TRAVELS

WHEN I visited America
I saw two things that struck
me as extraordinary:
People packed in the subway
Rocking uneasily on their hams
Endlessly studying the newspapers;
And people packed in the movies
Endlessly staring at the films.
I said to myself
If the American people ever develop
Minds
There are two great industries
That will crash.

AN AMERICAN MYSTIC

BUT you do not understand the subway,
Said an American mystic
Sitting next me at the Rotary Club.
It is a travelling hermitage,
A flying monastery,
A nunnery that moves at fifty miles an hour.
Into its roaring wagons
Thoughtful men and women descend with joy:
They know that there,
The only place in the whole city,
They can meditate undisturbed.

HE LIKES TO GIVE BOTH SIDES OF THE MATTER

AND as for the newspapers
(Said another)
You forget that they are the last friend
Many a poor devil has.
Go down to Battery Park
And see the chaps lying on the grass.
Newspapers are their blankets,
Their pillows, their sunshades;
Newspapers their Bibles.
After everything else has gone
A poor bum will cling to his newspaper
As his last link with life.

HE PASSES ON THE GOOD WORD

THE Americans, I said,
Are the kindest people in the world,
The most excitable,
The most juvenile.
The men are unaware of philosophy,
The women are unaware they are unaware of philosophy,
But the young girls . . .
And while I was talking
I heard with annoyance
My grand-nephew whispering,
"I must visit America.
I never heard the old statesman so eloquent."

THE OLD MANDARIN GRIEVES

WHEN I was in New York
I studied the faces of the people reading newspapers
In the subway,
And I saw that the papers most read
Were sensational, sordid, salacious.
And in my mind I composed a little message
To the editors of those papers.
"Your readers needed plain, nourishing truth" (I said)
"And you gave them this scented compost,
Spiced and sugared with vanilla and civet.
They asked for bread
And you gave them
A chocolate eclair."

A LETTER TO HIS FRIEND HO KUM

I WAS interested in New York
By the theatre advertisements,
And the skill with which
The critics' notices are utilized.
There was a play called *Nancy Knocks Her Knees.*
The *Lens* wrote: "This play is extraordinary pestilent rot,
Only by the tragically inappropriate talent of Mr. Soandso
Is there an occasional flash of humor."
I thought to myself:
"That show is done for, and a good job, too."
The next day I read the advertisements.
They said:
"Extraordinary . . . humor."—*Lens.*

VIGNETTE OF A POET

I GAVE a lecture (said the Old Mandarin)
To some friendly people in a New Jersey town,
And they told me that the famous poet,
William Butler Yeats,
Had once lectured there,
But that nobody could hear him.
And as he murmured his beautiful wistfulnesses
(Becoming less and less audible)
The audience began to twitch.
Suddenly he said:
"My poetry always seems sad,
But it never seemed as sad as it does tonight."

VERY FEW REMEMBER

AS I went down from Trenton
By a strip of canal sword-blade
blue in the dusk,
I suddenly remembered
That this was the way to Camp Dix
And I remembered
Troop trains travelling in the night.

THOUGHTS IN THE KITCHEN

THE night I gave a supper to
Chancellor Mu Kow
My serving maid departed,
And after the ceremony
I had to do the cleaning-up myself.
And I was thinking:
Even an "informal" dinner
Means a terrible lot of washing up.
And though it takes a pretty big flame
To boil a cauldron of water,
A very small flame
Will keep it boiling.
There must be some philosophical application for these thoughts
If I could only discern it.

ONLY WORD OF MOUTH

WHEN I die
I shall miss the ads.
There will be plenty of ads in Heaven—
Car-cards, billboards, double-page spreads,
All the delightful old favorites,
Such jolly folderol,
Such appealing bunkum.
But in Hell
There will be no ads—
It is too honest.

CERTAINTY

WHEN I visited your Great City
One of the newspapers
Was conducting a department
called
The Inquiring Reporter.
And I noticed
That no matter what questions the
reporter put
To the citizens he met
(Whether matters of finance, politics,
ethics, or sport)
They always had a definite answer
ready,
Prompt and precise,
Knowing exactly what ought to be done
about it.
What a shock it would have been to that
reporter
If he had met me,
For I might have said:
"I'm not sure. Come again to-morrow,
When I have thought it over,
And I may be able to offer an opinion."

A LETTER TO HIS FRIEND MU KOW

THE Americans are wrongly supposed to be
Deficient in delicate sentiment.
For when I was in New York
I went to the Polo Grounds
To see what they call the World's Series.
One has to watch baseball every instant,
Or you miss something.
For while I was foolishly admiring
The gold frontier of sunlight receding on the turf
There was a loud cry,
A whirl of dust and limbs,
And I feared some tragic accident.
But when I asked what was amiss
The man next me, with tears in his eyes,
Said that one of the players
Had stolen home.
And I thought to myself
How charmingly touching:
Here, amid all the uproar and excitement,
This fine fellow could not resist the call of his loved ones
And sacrificed his enjoyment just to greet his wife and bairns.

There can be no question about it,
For the next morning I read an account
of the game
Written by Irvin Cobb, one of their
Great Mandarins,
And he wrote:
"McNally, afflicted with acute nos-
talgia,
Stole home."

HE COMFORTS HIMSELF

WHEN I visited America
(It is the tedious Old Mandarin speaking)
I was eager to visit the birthplaces
Of Emily Dickinson and Louise Imogen Guiney,
And I found that this people
Had so neglected two of their greatest poets
That they hardly even knew their names.
But I was not peevish nor distraught:
I said to myself
Humanity is everywhere alike—
I myself am but little known in China.

HE IS ONLY HUMAN

ONLY once, I think,
Did I lose my temper;
And that was when the newsboy
In a train on Long Island
Cried, in a voice of violent hoarse as-
surance,
"Buy *Bringing Up Father*,
The Funniest Book Ever Published."
With my Oriental respect for ancestry,
I bought
And later on I said to the lad
(With, I fear, a touch of bitterness)
"Have you ever read *The Wrong*
Box?"

A MOMENT OF MEDITATION

I WAS told that America was a free country,
But I found many of its substantial citizens
Terrorized by the advertisements
Into believing it was immoral
To wear a straw hat
Later than September 15th.
Wise men know
There is no such thing as a free country—
There never will be.

LITTLE MINDS EVERYWHERE THE SAME

WHEN I walked in America
In my ample robes of a philosopher
Little dogs barked at me
And rude street-boys
Called me Lane Bryant,
Which is, apparently,
The name of an American mandarin.
Even so, when Prominent Americans
Visiting China
Go hurrying about in their tubular trowsers
Little dogs bark with anguish.
Thus do petty minds in all lands
Confronted by the unusual
Show their distress.

AN ENIGMA IN THE WOODPILE

AN American friend of mine,
A Man in a newspaper office,
Is very wealthy.
He tells me he has an income
Of 10,000 interruptions a year.

HIS EXPERIENCE WITH THE NEWSPAPERS

WHEN the ship came up the harbor
The New York reporters
Hastened to assail me with questions.
For some curious reason
They were eager for my views
On the Fourth Dimension,
Which was then
(So I heard afterward)
A subject of violent discussion
In the Sunday Magazine Sections.
Rather pleased by their interest in such matters,
I said, in all good faith,
The Fourth Dimension is Supra-Spatial:
It bears the same relation to Space
That Space does to Flatness.
It may be said to be Continuity,
Or, speaking poetically,
It is the Shadow
That Time casts on Eternity.

But the high-spirited City Editors,
Finding these modest thoughts of mine
Insufficiently nimble,
Invented others.

They came out that afternoon with large headlines:

AGED MANDARIN SAYS SHORT SKIRTS
MAKE HIM FEEL YOUNG AGAIN.

DEUS HAEC OTIA FECIT

I SEE a lawn
Strewn here and there with little
knobs of bone
And chewed billets,
And I feel justified in saying
Somewhere hereabouts
Is a dog.

I see a world
Strewn here and there
With delightful evidences of law—
Geometrical cobwebs, dark blue thunderheads,
The lid of the tea kettle gently chinkling,
Hailstones round and white as camphor-balls—
I say, it looks as though there were a god.

Even if this god is only the binomial theorem,
He is no less a god.

BURROWING LIKE A MOLE

WHAT is the difference
Between a Fried Egg
And a Freud Ego?
The same (my dear) as between
An omelet
And Hamlet.

THE HUBBUB OF THE UNIVERSE

MAN makes a great fuss
About this planet
Which is only a ball-bearing
In the hub of the universe.
It reminds me
Of the staff of a humorous weekly
Sitting in grave conference
On a two-line joke.

AN ARTIST

I KNOW a shoeshiner
Who applies his liquid polish
With little thin brushes
And breathes careful anxiety
As he paints the edge of my soles.
He ought to use a mahlstick—
He is an artist at heart.

A PATTERN IN THE MUD

SOMETIMES, in the slime of a city street,
You will see a clear and lovely pattern
Of little loops and triangles
Imprinted by the tire
Of a motor truck.
Such was the life of No Sho,
The young and tender poet.
The city crushed him,
But he left his runes
In the grime.

THE CIGARETTE STUB

TOSSED aside in the uproar
No Sho was quenched;
But in his verses
You will hear a satirical whisper
Like the hiss of a cigarette stub
Cast into a sink.

TO HIS SERVING MAID

Whom he discovered throwing perfectly good food into the garbage pail, e. g., remnants of lotus salad, pickled snails, and fragments of birds' nests which might have been made into nourishing soup.

TRANSFIXED with anguish
(O Daughter of Iniquity)
I stood when I saw the sarcastic moonlight
Gild the contents of your
Unthrifty garbage can.
O wasteful and slackminded offspring
Of a cheese-witted peasantry,
Fallen in evil ways
While in service to the Peking profiteers,
When half the world is starving
You would toss away
A practicable mouse-patty
Or an undamaged rice-cake—
When you die
And your miserable wraith
Approaches the Pagoda of the Immortals

May even that lean and gristly portion
    of your spirit
Which is worth saving
Be tossed without hesitation
Into the purgatorial incinerator.

CONTRADICTION

I SAW a man about to write a poem:
He trod ruthlessly down a subway car,
Leaving behind him, left and right.
Macerated corns
And anguished faces.
Twenty minutes later
He wrote a lyric
Of exquisite tenderness.

EXEMPT

IN a subway car
I saw a girl reading the *New Republic*.
Her long dark lashes
Were bent above an article
Called "The Surplus Woman,"
She was temptingly beautiful
And she smiled upon the text
With gentle assurance and security.

MEDITATIONS ON POETRY

POETS seem to be much in demand.
Drawing room evenings, women's
club meetings,
Literary luncheons, Chamber of Com-
merce dinners,
Wherever two or three sandwiches are
gathered together
There is always a poet
Exchanging his "message"
For an equivalent bulk
Of chicken chow mein
And jellied sharks' fins.
All this is proof
Of a widespread hunger,
And not merely on the part of the poet.

A PRAGMATIST

THE American poet Lindsay
(A mercurial fellow)
Began his career
By codifying the ways in which a poet
Can get a free meal.
Here was a seer!
Here was a man with strong grasp of
essentials!

A HAPPY LIFE

THE American poet Whitman
Did little to assist the razor industry,
But he erected a plausible philosophy
Of indolence
Which, without soft concealments,
He called *Loafing*.
This so irritated the American people
(Who were busy putting up buildings
And tearing them down again)
That they never forgave him.
He was deficient in humor,
But he had a good time.

A NATIONAL FRAILTY

THE American people
Were put into the world
To assist foreign lecturers.
When I visited them
They filled crowded halls
To hear me tell them Great Truths
Which they might as well have read
In their own prophet Thoreau.
They paid me, for this,
Three hundred dollars a night,
And ten of their mandarins
Invited me to visit at Newport.
My agent told me
If I would wear Chinese costume on the
platform
It would be five hundred.

THE MAN WITH THE RAKE

IT is queer to think that many people
Have never raked leaves.
On a brilliant Sunday morning in October
I admired trees as ruddy as burnt orange,
Trees as pale and clear as Sauterne.
The Sauterne of the leaves, I said to myself,
Raking placidly
And enjoying the crisp rustle.

That is what I like about raking leaves—
It is wine and opiate for the mind:
The incessant skirmish of the wits is calmed,
And as you rake and burn
And dodge, with smarting eyes,
The pungent, veering reek,
You fall into a dull easy muse,
And think to yourself,
After all, what is writing books
But raking leaves?

And at such times
I plant the seeds of poems.
It takes poems a long while to grow—

They lie germinating in the dark of the
mind;
But next spring, very likely,
There may emerge the green and tender
shoots
Of two or three bright stanzas.

VERITAS VOS DAMNABIT

IT is the mark of extreme youth
To believe that telling the Whole
Truth
Is always useful.
Truth is not a diet
But a condiment.

ANOTHER POSTPONEMENT

ONCE, on a midnight of rain and gale,
When the windows rattled in the hollow darkness,
I was in the kitchen
Eating cold turkey and cranberry sauce
Frisked from the icebox.
My mind was clear and busy:
Then, I suppose, I came as near as I ever shall
To being ready to write a great poem. . . .
But I lay down on my couch to meditate
And was soon fast asleep.

ADVANTAGE OF A BOOKISH UPBRINGING

WHEN the wine has done its rosy deed
(As the reputable English poet said)
I enjoy to study in tranquillity
The lovable absurdities of men.
And then my familiarity with literatures
Besteads me well,
Affording me always a scholarly explanation
For conduct seemingly eccentric.

Once, I remember,
After an evening in which Chancellor Mu Kow and myself
Had repeatedly toasted the loveliness of the moon,
Condoling her solitude
In the wide pale sky,
I lay in a perfection of comfortable thought
In a gently revolving cabbage field.
But my wife's parents
Heading the search party
Discovered me there, and cried lamentation and oxytones.

Be of good cheer, I said:
It is with me as with the great Flaubert
Who pernoctated in a cabbage patch
Noting down, for purpose of literature,
The tincture of moonshine
On the leaves of the vegetables.
Even so, I sacrifice myself for realism.
Tenderly they carried me in.

$(a + b)^2$

MARRIAGE is the square of *a*
plus *b*
In other words
$a^2 + b^2 + 2ab$
Where $2ab$ (of course)
Are twins.

SECRET THOUGHTS

AND while my visitor prattled
I courteously nodded;
My eye was fast upon him,
My face bright with attention;
But inwardly I was saying:
"The excellent fellow, why does he tell
me all this?
What has this to do with me?
O Buddha, when will he depart?"

THE REALIST

THE sun shone on the meadow
And painted silver patines on
the level river;
A purple bird spread scarlet wings
Under the trumpet vine arbor
And the scent of the pink melons was
in the balmy air.
But, down there by the waterside,
These colors gave me no comfort.
I was wondering
Whether an early morning bath
Would ease my mahogany colored
spaniel
Of his plague of fleas.

OVERDUE

AN Irish acquaintance
Insists, with monotonous outcry,
That I have been bought
"With British gold."
This is agreeable news,
But when
Do the payments begin?

ONEIROMANCY

YOU should never tell your dreams
If you wish them to come true"
My dear old great-aunt used to
say.
And now
Since Freud went into a second edition
I see she was ahead of her time.

MUTUAL ESTEEM

EVEN God
(A witty Frenchman has pointed out)
Was not an original creator,
For He made man
In His own image.
That is why man
Spells Him with a capital.

APOCALYPSE

EDWARD BOK has related
That when he went to call
On Ralph Waldo Emerson in
his last years,
The old philosopher
Was noncomposed in his wits.
If so, it was probably because
He had a psychic vision
Of the long panorama of the *L.H.J.*
Stretching away into the future.

SUNK WITHOUT TRACE

WE are well called brokers
For we are usually broke,
Cried the old financier on his deathbed;
But the heirs all unsuspecting
Were out among the Grand Banks
Fishing for codicils.

IRRITATION OF THE OLD MANDARIN

THERE was another reporter
(A young woman, this time)
Who came to my hotel to ask whether
The Fine Art of Self-Salesmanship
Had made much progress in China?
I said, "Dear young Madam,
As regards ladies, our language has for that Fine Art
An ugly word.
As regards Aggressive Business Men
I can only say,
Caveat Emptor."

HE BROODS

STUDYING the life of the Americans,
Its nervous haste,
Its lack of privacy,
I said to myself:
Oysters are here
But, loving this volatile people,
And desiring their souls' good,
When will cloisters
Come in season?

BIVALVES

THE pearl
Is a disease of the oyster.
A poem
Is a disease of the spirit
Caused by the irritation
Of a granule of Truth
Fallen into that soft gray bivalve
We call the mind.

ETERNITY AND THE TOOTH

IN regard to Eternity (said the Old Mandarin)
I feel about it as I do about one of my teeth.
Every now and then it gives me
A devil of a twinge,
And for a while
I groan and can think of naught else.
Then the anguish abates and I dismiss it from my mind.
But I know, just the same,
That some day
I've got to go through with it.

A PROVERB

WE have a saying in China
That a man will wash his hands cleaner for visitors
Than he will for the family.
Even so,
He who is full of sententious wisdom in public
May be dark and doubtful within.

THE TOLERATOR

FROM time to time
I have laid my heart bare before you
And you did not like it.
So I must point out to you
It is *my* heart, not yours.

My wrongness, perhaps,
Is dearer to me
Than your rightness.

Yet you must not think
That when I disagree with you
I dislike you.
On the contrary:
I love you for having ideas of your own.
I know how you came to have those ideas,
And they are precious to you.

THE PAINTER

I TALKED with a young painter,
And as we came along Beekman Street
My eye dwelt upon the shining audacity
Of the Woolworth Building.
But he was peering downward along the curb
Where were clear pools of melted snow.
"See!" he cried,
"That's how it ought to be painted!"
There, reflected in a long panel of water,
Sharp and exquisite, was the pale tower—
Enriching every puddle in the neighborhood.

True! I said—
Beauty is like the Medusa:
Look her in the face, and you run mad;
But, like Perseus,
Study her reflection in the polished shield.
Look upon life in the mirror of some art
And, perhaps, you will stay sane.

THE POET

I TALKED with a poet
Who had just cashed a royalty check.
"In the last six months," he boasted,
"They sold thirty copies.
I tell you, it warms the cockles
Of my right-hand trouser."

ADJUSTMENT

IN your Great City
I see, in jewellers' windows,
Clocks that tell the guaranteed
Correct Time;
And in front of those clocks people
always halted
Adjusting their watches.
But suppose there were displayed, be-
side the street,
Some great poem,
Telling perfect Truth or Beauty,
How many passengers
Would pause to adjust their minds?

ANTICRASTINATION

ON my way to your theatres, said
the dubious Old Mandarin,
I see To-morrow's papers already
on sale
At eight o'clock To-night,
So does your strange mad city
Leap hotly towards the Future,
Tossing aside each Day before it is
finished,
Hungrily, fatuously, craving the next.
Is it possible that the Editor
Is dissatisfied with each and every of his
irreplaceable To-days
That he hurries To-morrow so close
upon its heels?

OH, INEQUITABLE BUILDINGS!

AND as for those who work on
lower Broadway,
What are they, poor hasty mice,
But canyon fodder?

TICK DOULOUREUX

I AM wounded
In a fatal artery.
The vein of Time is cut,
The minutes are bleeding, bleeding away.
Bartender, make me a tourniquet for this hemorrhage
Or I shall tick to death.

Here Ends This Book of Translations from the Chinese, Scrupulously Deciphered by Christopher Morley from the original cordiscript, and published by George H. Doran Company in the month of May, 1922. And both publisher and author invoke handsome generous blessing upon anyone who actually buys it.